

Dual Network Ban
Maintain the current policy

Due to changes in society, the Federal Communications Commission, or FCC, is reviewing six rules regarding broadcast ownership. This is done, according to www.fcc.gov, to decide whether the six rules in question "are necessary in the public interest as a result of competition." In June 2006, one of the six rules under review was the Dual Network Ban which began in 1946 and first pertained to radio networks only, followed by television networks a few years later. In 2003, the FCC retained the Dual Network Ban rule. I believe it is in the best interest of the public to maintain the Dual Network Ban once again. Defined by www.fcc.gov:

"The Dual Network Rule prohibits a merger between or among these four television networks: ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC."

The Dual Network Ban promotes healthy competition among networks and allows for diversity in the newsroom. If the Dual Network Ban was revised the assortment of news stories with varying points of view would decrease. Neil Hickey, who wrote *As the FCC prepares to alter the media map, battle lines are drawn*, discusses the repercussions of eliminating the Dual Network rule. He points out that already journalists in Los Angeles' CBS "stations share a news director and so do Fox's". By sharing news directors, stories will be produced similarly in each station which could affect how politics are portrayed to the country among other issues.

Thinking about the effects of allowing two major networks to merge brings specific events to mind such as the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995. If two major networks had merged prior to the bombing, footage and interviews may have been shared between networks. Gene Roberts, a professor at the University of Maryland claims that "easing the rules... are just going to make an already bad situation even worse. There's very little news competition in most parts of the country, and we're about to have even less." It is hard enough to witness scenes from the Oklahoma City bombing; it would be even harder to witness the same footage on two networks playing over and over again. Without healthy competition among the big four networks, reports may begin to appear the indistinguishable. The network ban reduces the likeliness of similar footage being broadcast nationally.

Furthermore, Americans thrive on diversity and permitting a merger between any two of the top four national networks would go against what the FCC strives to do. Kathleen Kirby from the Association of Electronic Journalists, argues that the Dual

Network Ownership rule is in place to “promote competition in the national television advertising and program acquisition markets and promotes localism by preserving the balance of negotiating power between networks and affiliates.” Media in America would become homogenized rather than diversified if the big four networks were allowed to merge.

Also, though there are hundreds of channels for a person to watch on cable, some citizens are limited to only locally broadcast channels which would be greatly impacted by any change in the Dual Network Ban. It is in the best interest of those citizens to have the freedom to choose which network to watch, without being limited by a network merger. By allowing networks to merge, the FCC would also have to consider revising the Local Television Ownership Limit. David Lieberman and Paul Davidson of USA Today say that “networks make most of their profit from the local stations they own that carry their national programming. It would not make sense for a company to buy a second major network unless it could also own the network's stations.” In order for a major network to be successful locally, the FCC would need to reconsider the ownership percentage cap to allow networks the option of owning local stations.

Overall, the Dual Network Ban provides an array of programming available for the public to watch. It also limits the probability of repeat broadcasts and footage appearing on more than one of the big four networks (ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC). The American public would benefit from retaining the current policy and according to a 2003 Media Update Survey, under the direction of Princeton Research Associates, “half [of those surveyed] say the FCC decision [to loosen restrictions] would have a negative impact on the country”. I believe it is important for the country to not be oppressed by big four network mergers and have the freedom to hear from many different voices throughout many different stations. Due to my belief in the freedom of choice, the Dual Network Ban should remain unaltered.

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